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Images and Memory: Religiosity and Sacrifice – The Cases of Tierralta, Trujillo and Arenillo in Colombia

Freddy A. Guerrero* and Liza López Aristizabal†

ABSTRACT

Memory in Colombia is a human right that is recognized for victims and society in the framework of processes of transitional justice, and in the last decade there has been an institutionalization of memory, with organizations arising whose purpose is to manage memory initiatives in the country. However, organizational and community memory and denunciation processes and practices have been developed, materialized and represented through objects/images, like sources and references for memory aimed to account for the atrocious past and promote acts of resistance and humanity amid the inhumanity of war. From a *fragmentary* perspective, we concentrate on three cases of images in Colombia that, based on religious and cultural representations, allow us to observe their power in processes of recovering memory, of denunciation and demands with regard to respect for human rights.

KEYWORDS: memory, fragments, religious images, Colombia

INTRODUCTION: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN COLOMBIA

Representative milestones in transitional justice (TJ) can be found throughout the world, such as the cases of South Africa, Ireland, Central America, the Southern Cone and countries in Eastern Europe. More than 52 countries have experienced such processes, noted by Ruti Teitel when referring to the third phase of contemporary TJ, which was preceded by phases associated with the Nuremberg trials and by processes of democratization since the 1980s.[1]

These TJ processes require returning to the management of memory or of forgetting, based on the testimonials of victims. Management is not necessarily linked to institutional processes. Rather, major contributions have also emerged from cultural and artistic arenas through organizations, communities, individuals and groups of

* Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Cali, Colombia. Researching culture, memories and coexistence with the research group BITACUS. Email: faguerrero@javerianacali.edu.co http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2626-4576

† Professor, Department of Legal and Political Sciences, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Cali, Colombia, and Professor, Department of Administration and Organizations, Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia. Email: liza.lopez@javerianacali.edu.co, lopez.liza@correounivalle.edu.co

1 Ruti G. Teitel, 'Transitional Justice Genealogy,' *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 69–94.

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victims. This approach is based on the premise of establishing victims and their experience as an ethical horizon and vindicating them through the imperative of memory.

In the field of TJ, the solely legalistic view has been recognized as insufficient: 'Too much law, it has been said, skews the truth and brings too little justice.'[2] The aesthetic dimension is thus considered essential, as its expressions are linked to justice as a promise of transition. In turn, artistic expressions facilitate individual narratives, resulting in shared views of the past – a fundamental topic in TJ – and reflecting how artistic production has become a form of political representation during political transitions.[3]

Artistic production in contexts that challenge the construction of peace within the framework of TJ is not always political. However, much of it is relevant to political issues, as Bill Rolston and Sofi Ospina note regarding the creation of murals in Colombia, which articulate the memory of violence and represent victims' demands for acknowledgement, reparation and justice. That articulation varies in different regions in Colombia, depending on the balance of forces between guerrillas, former paramilitaries and the state.[4]

Thus, TJ testimonials are linked to memory. In the specific case of images and memory in context, literature regarding the production of memory makes strong reference to images of the Holocaust produced through photographic and cinematic representation.[5]

The Holocaust comes up in references regarding the imaginable and the unimaginable of representations in social contexts that challenge the barbaric past during TJ processes.[6] It provides opportunities for reflections and discussions regarding testimonial sources and ways to address and represent the legacy of abuses.[7]

In Latin America, post-dictatorship TJ scenarios entailed memory work that led to a memory 'boom'[8] which included exploring the relationship between photography as a memory device and denunciation,[9] in addition to other situations of memory that emerged through the image after democracy was restored. This resulted in images referring to the past in cinematic or pictorial manifestations linked more to reflection than to affective reminiscence, as well as being the object of discussion

2 C. Brants, A. Hol and D. Siegel, eds., *Transitional Justice: Images and Memories* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 4.

3 Eliza Garnsey, 'Rewinding and Unwinding: Art and Justice in Times of Political Transition,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10(3) (2016): 471–491.

4 Bill Rolston and Sofi Ospina, 'Picturing Peace: Murals and Memory in Colombia,' *Race and Class* 58(3) (2017): 23–45.

5 Epi Neuraska, 'Auswitchpark. Herejía y belleza,' *Revista de estudios culturales sobre el movimiento gótico* 1 (2013): 283–302; Alejandro Baer, 'El testimonio audiovisual y la construcción de la memoria colectiva: la representación del Holocausto según el proyecto Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation,' *Revista Historia y Política* 10 (2005): 279–284; Cornelia Brink, 'Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps,' *History and Memory* 12(1) (2000): 135–150.

6 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Imágenes Pese a Todo. Memoria Visual Del Holocausto* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2004).

7 Elizabeth Jelin, *Los Trabajos de La Memoria* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Siglo XXI, 2002).

8 Ibid.

9 Carolina Anabel Bravi, 'La Obstinada Presencia de Los Que Ya No Están. Muestra Fotográfica Ausencias, de Gustavo Germano. Escuela Normal de Paraná José María Torres,' *Culturas* 10 (2017): 181–186, https://doi.org/10.14409/culturas.v0i10.6144.

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regarding mechanisms of representation and the collective meaning they attempt to transmit.[10]

In Colombia, long before the state's institutionalizing of processes of memory, the human rights movement used memory as a tool to build social awareness through recording and denunciating human rights violations, particularly since the 1960s.[11] The 1990s saw the development of discourses and organizations associated with peace, established as a right in the Colombian constitution of 1991.

For the actors directly committed to TJ processes – politicians, businesspeople, victims, demobilized combatants, national human rights organizations and international bodies – memory did not appear as a central concern of state policies until the social, legal and political processes that germinated in two frameworks of TJ in the country: negotiations between the Colombian government and the paramilitary groups in 2003, and the peace accord between the state and one of the oldest guerrilla groups on the continent, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*, or FARC-EP), in 2016. In each, important laws were generated that sustained the regulatory framework of TJ: Law 975 of 2005, known as the Peace and Justice Law, and Law 1448 of 2011, known as the Victims and Land Restitution Law.[12]

These regulations were upheld by state institutions responsible for administering and managing memory: the Historical Memory Group (*Grupo de Memoria Histórica*, or GMH), part of the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (*Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación*), which was created by Law 975 of 2005 to reconstruct the origin and evolution of the armed conflict.[13]

With Law 1448 of 2011, the National Center for Historical Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, or CNMH) was created, composed of members of the GMH, among others. Memory thus became a fundamental aspect of the contentious TJ processes.

These commitments to memory are crystalized in initiatives of all types in the public realm, including the production of books, collective actions of denunciation, artistic manifestations through theater, music, performance, memory festivals, galleries, exhibits, registries and archives of human rights violations.

As a component of their social demands and forms of resistance to the violent conflict, victims and their allies, as well as establishments for the defense of human rights and religious organizations, have created organizational forms that appeal to

10 Lorena Cardona González, 'Silencios. Memoria Visual del Holocausto en Colombia,' *Revista Colombiana de Sociología* 40(1) (2017): 133–160; Gastón Lillo, '"La Teta asustada" (Perú, 2009) de Claudia Llosa: ¿memoria U Olvido?' *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 37(73) (2011): 421–446; Sandra Marcela Ríos Rincón and Juan Carlos Ramos Pérez, 'Memoria, Imagen y Violencia. Rastros de Memoria Colectiva en el Arte Pictórico,' *(Pensamiento), (palabra) Y Obra*, no. 11 (2014).

11 Gonzalo Sánchez G., 'Genealogía y Políticas de la Memoria. Momentos y Convergencias de la Enunciación Social de la Memoria del Conflicto Armado en Colombia,' *Análisis Político* 31(92) (2018): 96–114.

12 Liza López Aristizábal and Freddy A. Guerrero, 'La Tridimensionalidad de la Víctima: Un Análisis del Discurso en el Proceso de Transición Colombiano,' *Análisis Político* 31(93) (2018): 169–188.

13 Jefferson Jaramillo Marín, 'La Reconstrucción de La Memoria Histórica del Conflicto Colombiano en el Actual Proceso de Justicia y Paz. Alcances, Desafíos y Preguntas,' *Desafíos* 22(2) (2010): 31–70.

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devices and technologies of memory[14] that represent suffering through initiatives based on art and culture.

In the following sections, we present a perspective from which to interpret the production of images that we term 'fragmentary' and which are connected to victims' rights in memory construction processes in the context of TJ in Colombia. This topic is relevant in terms of both the limits and possibilities of the iconography linked to memory, as it enables understanding of the practices of communities and organizations with respect to the memory of conflict. This interest should affect the current processes of the Truth Commission in Colombia.

Three images are discussed: a mural called the Tree of Life, a painting that represents Cristo Tiberio and a statue of the Virgin of Miracles.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE: A LOOK AT IMAGES AND FRAGMENTS

In the autobiographical work by the French writer Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, the narrator begins with a story about his childhood, reduced to the routine event of going to bed at night, with images recorded and bounded by the space of his family home in the south of France, but nothing beyond that.[15] He laments the void in his spirit caused by the limitation of that voluntary memory that cannot access other times, other places and other experiences in the French village. For the narrator, all of that is dead.

Notable in that critique of memory is the influence of Henri Bergson, an important figure in the early 20th century because of his reflections on memory.[16] Memory that is evoked, reconstructed by intelligibility, is a (good or bad) sketch but not the experience itself, in this case the experience of the past.

Following the critique of that dead past and in a metaphoric sense, Proust's narrator discusses a Celtic belief that the souls of lost beings are trapped in an animal or inanimate object until – by chance, not through any particular effort – the being or object shivers, and we recognize them, and they overcome death and return to live among us.[17]

That shiver provoked by access to the experience of memory is encountered by the narrator through a stroke of luck. His mother offers him a piece of madeleine cake that he moistens with tea, and the moment he eats it, something happens inside of him: the experiences of his past begin to be evoked beyond the routine, thus the limits of the walls, rooms and stairways of his home are surpassed and represented in

14 Oriana Bernasconi, Elizabeth Lira and Marcela Ruiz, 'Political Technologies of Memory: Uses and Appropriations of Artefacts that Register and Denounce State Violence,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13(1) (2019): 7–29.

15 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (London: Penguin, 2003).

16 Henri Bergson, *Historia de La Idea del Tiempo* (Barcelona: Paidos, 2018). Going to intuition will be the way to sympathize with the thing itself (Acudir a la intuición será la manera de simpatizar con la cosa misma). Henri Bergson, *Introducción a La Metafísica* (México, DF: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1960).

17 Marcel Proust, *Por El Camino de Swann* (Bogotá: Ed. Oveja Negra, 1982).

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the experiences that Proust records in the seven volumes comprising that extensive evocation or recovery of *lost time*, one that now appears alive.

Walter Benjamin later entered the debate about voluntary and involuntary memory. He claimed they are not exclusive, arguing that wherever there are experiences and contents from an individual past, these will conjoin with those of the collective past, so incorporating into religions, ceremonies or festivities social reiterations that provoke memories.[18]

This argument demonstrates that an underlying epistemology pervades the thinking of Bergson and Benjamin – namely, the present experience does not constitute the entire cognitive reality; the factual presents us the memory that simultaneously is seemingly absent and has already existed.

Benjamin's interpretation of the allegory of the angel of history brings us closer to the experience of the remnant, the ruin, the fragment as an ethical action toward the ghost waiting to be resurrected: to give it justice or to recognize in it the unresolved injustice.[19] In Benjamin's work, the ruins as fragments, or rather, the miserable figures (the prostitute, the ragman and the flaneur), constitute the framework for understanding society and its idea of progress.

This sense of the fragmentary prompts us to consider objects and images as symptoms of the culture. Consider, in this case, the violence that encloses its spectral reality and that could be called traumatic. In its imprint on the images of memory, this violence demands – like the ruins of the angel of history – justice for the injustice.

In Warburgian iconology, the notion of survival (*nachleben*) dovetails well with this epistemology. Warburg highlighted that remnants constitute motives that could be transmitted in works of art and that, in one respect, are a material representation of the subjectivity of an era and a culture.[20] These cultural symptoms can be expressed through a spectral or negative reality, 'namely, what appears to be a discarded element in a culture, something which is no longer of its time and no longer of any use.'[21]

Fragmented memory would thus advance us further toward accessing that spectral reality, constituting the image from a temporal dimension in terms of the anachronistic and revisionary encounter of the present with the past through the image.

Fragmented memory also takes on a spatial dimension. In his work on sites of memory, Pierre Nora examines how they contain a material, symbolic and functional condition. For Nora, the significance of sites of memory is inscribed onto the site itself, closed around its identity and open to the expansion of its meanings.[22] In the case of images in a TJ process, certain sites of memory serve as testimonies and memorials.[23] Testimonies, insofar as their materiality reflects the acts of conflict, whether symbolically or materially, become memorials of the acts themselves or the

18 Walter Benjamin, *Ensayos Escogidos* (Mexico: Ediciones Coyoacan, 2008).

19 Walter Benjamin, *Iluminaciones* (Bogotá: Ed. Taurus, 2018).

20 David Freedberg, *Las Máscaras de Aby Warburg* (Buenos Aires: Sans soleil, 2013).

21 Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Imagen Superviviente: Historia del Arte y Tiempo de Los Fantasmas Según Aby Warburg* (Madrid: Abada ed., 2009), 50.

22 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

23 Eliza Garnsey, 'Rewinding and Unwinding: Art and Justice in Times of Political Transition,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10(3) (2016): 471–491.

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context that facilitated them. These sites can summon specific events or figures, such as those intended to settle hegemonic, national or emblematic histories (Auschwitz, national monuments or hegemonic emblems of national histories). Other sites may circulate or become established in more private domains and be portrayed in contexts where they predominate as part of what Michael Pollak terms an underground memory,

> which, as an integral part of minority and dominated cultures, oppose the 'official memory,' in this case, the national memory. At first, this approach empathizes with the dominated groups as a methodological rule and rehabilitates the periphery and marginality.[24]

Sometimes, this memory is private, or the accompanying objects are located in public spaces, beholden not to oblivion but to the silence of the citizens. In the latter case, the fragmentary sense of sites of memory exhibits a spatial dimension: in their materiality, the sites reflect the imprint of the past becoming a memorial but remain peripheral and marginal in contexts of latent violence and conflict.

We locate a final dimension of fragmented memories in the relational. Although the images show the untimeliness of the past in the present through iconic materiality, the latter is also a testimony and memorial in contexts that give it a particular meaning. Additionally, the social construction of these fragmented memories is important, which forms through the relationships established between the images and those who produce and experience them as reference points of collective memory. Pollak considers these reference points to be indicators of collective memory. Moving beyond Maurice Halbwach's conception of functional continuity and stability,[25] Pollak underlines the work of memory construction in an arena of disputes over its meaning and content. These disputes are framed in terms of domination, confronting the official and dominant memory with underground memories but also explaining the significance of silence about the past in relations between minority groups and the surrounding society, or, as Jacques Rancière argues with regard to intolerable images, such images generate an interpellation of the Real where the force of their silence (that of the images and of the witnesses) translates the unrepresentability of the event, which thus exists only through its representation. The power of the voice opposed to images must be expressed in images. The refusal to speak, and the obedience to the voice that commands, must therefore be made visible.[26]

Amid these relationships, the forbidden, unspeakable memory – or the shameful or meaningful silence – is in opposition to national memories and would be a reference point in family groups, associations or other affective or political networks. Both in relation to their narratives and as artifacts of memory, the images compensate for silence and act as private or public references of the collective memory that enables translation.

24 Michael Pollak, 'Memoria, Olvido, Silencio,' *Revista Estudios Históricos* 2(3) (1989): 4.

25 Maurice Halbwachs, *Los Marcos Sociales de la Memoria* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2004); Maurice Halbwachs, *La Memoria Colectiva* (Zaragoza: Ediciones Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2005).

26 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009).

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There will undoubtedly be transits through contextual, political, cultural and social conditions that expand or restrict the forms of expressing the past; disputes may sometimes constitute an emblematic memory, as a framework for understanding the past, which manages to articulate loose memories or preserve them as unfathomable individual experiences. In terms of images, a clear example is the memorials, pilgrimages or galleries comprised of photographs that give meaning to a form of victimization (disappeared, killed by paramilitary, insurgent or state actors) and collectively bring together discourses and actions from individual images, which privately acquire their own forms of ritualizing, consecrating and enunciating the past. The relational dimension of fragmented memories is thus located in the difficulty of accounting for the totality and presenting it precisely as a fragment of the real, insofar as a sense of uniqueness will always be open and partial.

Three iconic images are the focus of our attention: first, the Tree of Life, a mural in the municipality of Tierralta Córdoba, where the most sinister terror group in Colombia's conflict was born, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, or AUC); second, Cristo Tiberio (Tiberio Christ), a painting located in Monument Park in Trujillo, a space built and created as a form of symbolic and moral reparation for the victims of the so-called Trujillo Massacre; and third, the Virgin of Miracles, a figure located on the Arenillo path in the municipality of Palmira, an area occupied and controlled by the Calima block of the AUC from 1999 to 2004.

The following questions arise: How do religious images in contexts of armed conflict establish themselves as referents of collective memory? What is the contribution of these referents to TJ processes, particularly in Colombia?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Our work covers experiences in the municipalities of Tierralta (northern Colombia), Trujillo and Arenillo (southwestern Colombia). Although each place possesses important complexities relative to the sociopolitical context, the relevant social actors and the dynamics of violence, we interpret the resulting cultural production in each case as fragments and clues, particularly some images with religious and human rights allegories. Through their silence, these images allow the beholder to discover the voices of denunciation, resistance and humanity that have sometimes remained silent.[27] In Tierralta, the experience is based on the work completed by one of the researchers as project advisor for the Jesuit Refugee Service from 2003 to 2005 and who accompanied victims and displaced communities in the region. This experience later informed the development of research by determining the limits and scope of the representation of memory in the area studied.

In Trujillo, the work explores the reflections appearing on the memorial in honor of the victims of the Trujillo Massacre. This exploration is situated within the

27 This research did not involve experimental work with humans and thus posed no risk to them. The communities involved provided informed consent, and were guaranteed that the information collected would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. The investigations of Tierralta and Arenillo were approved by the ethics committees at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Pontifical Xavierian Universities) of Bogotá and Cali, respectively, the former in 2009 and the latter in 2017.

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framework of multiple visits completed as part of an anthropology course coordinated by one of the researchers.

Finally, the case of Arenillo results from a research project initiated in 2017 and completed in March 2019, based on a partnership between the National Center of Historical Memory and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Cali. Within this framework, the researchers and authors of this article established a Regional Group for Historical Memory, which supports initiatives devoted to the memory of the community of Arenillo, affected between 1999 and 2004 by the presence of paramilitary groups in the region.

In addition to the images, whose quality, particularly that of the mural in Tierralta, depended on the existence of available archives and direct photography, the sources of this work also included interviews, documentary sources, workshops with residents of the community of Arenillo, and group tours and deliberations with students of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Cali resulting from visits to both Arenillo and Trujillo. This combination of sources was used to give voice to the voiceless through the aesthetic devices deployed as part of their memory.

The three cases are analyzed using an iconographic and iconological approach, centered on the processes by which the fragmented memory is presented in each image. The following dimensions are considered: a spatial dimension in which the objects divulge the content of their untimeliness and materiality in certain contexts that assign it a particular value; a temporal dimension, which makes visible the spectral and the content to which it refers; and the relational dimension, which presents the disputes and silences in the articulation between the victim populations or communities and the mediations generated by the images studied.

The three images are contextualized within the spaces through which they circulate or become established, thus giving importance to the space in which the images gain a social and political meaning and the conflict situations in which they emerge, as well as the content and tensions that these images provide as containers of memory. We therefore access them as indicators in Carlo Ginzburg's sense, namely, using the fragmented materiality of the images as icons that record, enunciate and denounce a context.[28] From a temporal dimension of fragmentary memory, we locate the tensions that the images express between the present of their materiality and the 'ghosts' they evoke.

RELIGIOUS IMAGES AS FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY: THE CASES OF TIERRALTA, TRUJILLO AND ARENILLO

Tierralta, Córdoba: The Tree of Life or the Disappearance of Fragments

The development cooperation agency Misereor, an initiative of the episcopate of the German Catholic Church, makes an annual grant to an artist somewhere in the world to create the so-called Lenten Veil, a work of art that seeks to generate global dialog and reflection. In 1982, the Haitian artist Jacques Chéry was commissioned for this purpose.

28 Carlo Ginzburg, 'Indicios. Raíces de un Paradigma de Inferencias Indiciales,' in *Mitos, Emblemas, Indicios: Morfología e Historia* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1989).

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Chéry's work, a painting organized in three horizontal and three vertical lines, recreates the tree of life: 'the roots of evil, scenes of violence, war and torture' on the lower level; 'the overcoming of evil through Christ' in the center; and 'hope and promise' on the upper level. In the vertical lines, the first refers to man, the second to Christ and the third to the Church.[29]

Thus, the nine panels that converge along the levels and axes possess specific motives. We are interested in the fifth panel, the fragment referring to discord. Regarding this, Misereor states:

> The artist relates the passion and sacrifice of Christ with the semi-dark scene of the roots. Jesus overcomes evil through his passion. He is the same Christ who hangs on the cross, who is seated in the boat of the fugitives, who faints under the soldiers' sticks. Despite everything, the world manifests itself in relation to Him as full of darkness: '. . .the men referred the darkness to the light, because their actions were evil.' We all know the darkness of our times: conflicts, war, violence, torture, fear.[30]

Chéry's painting represents on the dark lower level the reality of Haiti during the Duvalier dictatorship. Conflict, war, violence, torture and fear were, however, not a type of darkness experienced only by Haiti.

The Tree of Life served as inspiration for the Jesuit priest Sergio Restrepo, who reproduced Chéry's image using elements from daily life in the region of Tierralta in the Alto Sinú in southern Córdoba. This is the area where *Los Tangueros* appeared, paramilitaries based at the Castaño brothers' ranch known as *Las Tangas*, a death squad that would later become the United Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (*Autodefensas Unidas de Córdoba y Urabá*) and subsequently the AUC. This context considers the articulation between the image and the space in which it is installed, which gives particular value to the meaning of the image.

The history of the Sinú region, where the municipality of Tierralta is located, has been one of gold prospectors since the 18th century. The region reflects the indigenous presence displaced early on by these colonizers and by the constant presence of settlers in the Paramillo Massif and the surrounding areas, as well as the indigenous refuge and retreat because of various wars and the presence of armed actors such as the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejercito Popular de Liberación*) since the 1960s, and the FARC and AUC since the 1980s.

Along with tensions over land between landowners with extensive tracts dedicated to cattle ranching and small subsistence farmers or rural workers living nearby or in the forested zones of the neighboring hillsides, the exploitation of wood and the coca economy in the last 25 years have negatively affected this area in terms of security and possibilities for development among residents, many of whom have been displaced to urban areas by the violence.

In 1987, Restrepo ordered the creation of the mural with the following specifications, according to Father Javier Giraldo:

29 Victoria Emily Jones, 'Hungry for Righteousness in Haiti,' Artway, https://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=2108&lang=en&action=show (accessed 26 November 2019).

30 The Lenten Cloth of Misereor of Haiti by Jacques Chéry, 1982, © MVG.

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Figure 1: Tierralta mural. Source: in Guerrero, 2009[31]

> When Sergio gave the guidelines to the [local] artist to carry out the work, he asked him to make the torture scene portray the criminal act known among the people of Tierralta involving the torture by soldiers of the former priest Bernardo Betancur. This sin continued to demand justice, as Bernardo Betancur, the former parish priest of Tierralta, who upon leaving the priesthood continued to live among this population, was detained and tortured several times by members of the Army and was murdered by them on November 3rd, 1988. The artist captured the physical features of the victim in the torture scene, such that, without any need for explanation, the people constantly read that silent denunciation and questioned it.[32]

The image of Christ would acquire a powerful significance. In Rancière's terms, it was intolerable because of the distribution of blame and indifference and because of the public setting of its exhibition: the church pulpit (Figure 1).

The image of Christ being crucified in the Tierralta mural shows the fragment that draws our attention, with a victim and specific aggressors; the denunciation is apparent. This fragment is presented as a dialectical image, as in Giraldo's quote, which identifies the ghosts of an unresolved injustice (torture, victims and war) in a context of present violence.

In 1989, soldiers in the area asked the bishop to remove the mural. The regime of silence demanded of the image was not finished. Consequently, on 1 June of that year, agents from the B2 (the intelligence unit of the armed forces) set out from the

31 Freddy A. Guerrero, 'Memoria y Excepcionalidad en El Alto Sinú. Los Límites y Alcances de La Re-Presentación' (Cali, Colombia: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2009).

32 Javier Giraldo, *Aquellas Muertes Que Hicieron Resplandecer La Vida*, https://issuu.com/desdelosmargenes/docs/_aquellas_muertes (accessed 1 November 2019), 188 (English translation by authors).

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Figure 2: Tierralta mural with the motif on discord modified. Source: in Guerrero, 2009[33]

Castaño brothers' farm *Las Tangas* to assassinate Father Restrepo and left his body hanging by the door of the church after the attack.

Months later, the fragment material of the mural regarding discord had changed: it was now a palimpsest hiding the record of barbarity, contradictorily adding specters against the grain of the images, which begin disappearing. The image shifted from a memorial to a witness of barbarism (Figure 2).

Over the course of five years of visits to Tierralta, none of the researchers had taken an interest in the colorful mural. Concern over the painting only arose when, in an interview in front of the church, one of the residents pointed it out and stated that it was the reason for Restrepo's assassination. The image that appeared there was not shocking, for the fragment material underneath showing discord could not be seen, and the fact of discord was not recognized, nor were its origins in the work by Chéry. The image was simply a mural.

What is now a palimpsest depicts an emergency situation in which the darkness is the product of a natural disaster caused by flooding, rather than the effect of the experience of war and limitless violence. The former Jesuit Bernardo Betancur has disappeared literally and metaphorically from the denunciation and the memory expressed in the mural, and in his place is a flimsy dwelling being consumed by the river. The war tank and military plane have also disappeared, the soldiers have been changed into a woman farmer, dressed not in army green helmets or hats but, rather, in the traditional *sombrero vueltiao* of Córdoba. In short, these significant motives that evoked the specter of violence became remnants, becoming hidden fragments through the resignification of the image.

33 Guerrero, supra n 31.

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In 2010, the Society of Jesus decided to leave the parish in the hands of the Diocese, and a new priest with a different perspective ordered the wall to be painted, thus leaving a Christ empty of significance on a white wall.

This vignette demonstrates the random appearance of the mural to the researcher, an encounter with an underground memory that is still awaiting justice for the injustices that lie beneath the layers of silencing paint which cover and hide the image of a crucified Christ, or rather, two figures: Bernardo Betancur and Sergio Restrepo. The mural remains here in a region that was the site of demobilization and negotiation between the state and paramilitaries in 2003, thus initiating the first TJ process of the 21st century in Colombia, and continues to be a center of violence and uncertainty for inhabitants.

This memory endures in these disappeared, encapsulated fragments, a literally underground memory, waiting, like the lost souls of the Celts, to be freed.

Trujillo: Cristo Tiberio or Emergence from the Fragments

We now move on to another Christ figure (Figure 3). This figure occurs in a process that we contend is the inverse of that of Tierralta, for it is not an image that materially and symbolically disappears through a regime of silence. Rather, it is an appearance and condensation of loose memories with an emblematic character, as we explain shortly.

First, a brief contextualization. In the Valle del Cauca Department in the northeastern region of Colombia, processes of colonization by farmers have taken place since the late 19th and early 20th centuries along the border with the Choco Department. With access to fertile land, some groups of colonizers founded what is now the municipality of Trujillo. The configuration of settlements in these territories also brought with it tensions over land use, tenure and ownership among rancher landowners and settlers.

The main economic activity was agriculture, particularly coffee and some transitory subsistence crops, as well as limited cattle ranching and the exploitation of environmental resources. This contributed to the tensions over land and problems experienced throughout most regions of the country in the 1920s due to increased coffee prices and the appreciation of land on hillsides.[34]

The region's political sectors were at the heart of many conflicts in the 20th century in Trujillo. However, with the explosion of drug trafficking in the 1980s, new illegal actors came to play an important role in the establishment of violence and authoritarianism, exacerbated by the presence of guerrilla groups and the vulnerability and stigmatization of farmers, indigenous people and other settlers labeled as collaborators with the insurgency or considered an obstacle to the exercise of local power.

Thus, from 1986 to 1994, a series of events occurred, constituting what would be called the Trujillo Massacre or, by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the Violent Events in Trujillo. This was the result of a criminal

34 GRMH-CNRR, *Trujillo, Una Tragedia Que No Cesa*, 2a ed. (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2008), http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2008/informe_trujillo.pdf.

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Figure 3: Cristo Tiberio. Photograph taken by Nelsón Fernandez[35]

plot among mafia sectors in the area and the consent or participation of some state agents, judicial officials, the armed forces and the police.

The massacre produced 342 victims of homicide, torture and forced disappearance, turning each victim into loose and underground memories until their displacement and settlement through the notion of a massacre. The climax of the massacre occurred in 1990, an era marked by the assassination of some woodworkers from the urban area of Trujillo and disappearances of farmers, as well as other disappearances and assassinations in previous years of members of cooperatives and other rural organizations.

35 Photograph taken by the president of the Association of Relatives of the Victims of Trujillo for this article.

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One individual yet emblematic case of the Trujillo Massacre relates to the life and body of Father Tiberio Fernández Mafla. Tiberio, born in Trujillo, had diocesan training and knowledge concerning cooperativism. Based on his regional knowledge, his training as a priest and his knowledge of cooperativism, he developed organizational processes that allowed him to gain legitimacy among a large number of residents, forming cooperatives and other organizational entities, in addition to supporting peasant mobilizations in the municipality. These actions were regarded with suspicion, given the convergence of his work with the existence of guerilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or ELN) and the 19 April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*, or M19), which began to have a presence in the region in the mid-1980s.

On 15 April 1990, Father Tiberio Fernández was tortured, murdered and thrown into the waters of the Cauca River.

A few hours earlier, after presiding over a funeral service for a friend murdered in Tuluá, a nearby municipality, the car he was traveling in with his niece and two companions was intercepted. They were taken to Villa Paola Farm, owned by the drug trafficker Henry Loaiza, alias *el Alacrán* (the scorpion).

There, based on testimonies by participants at the event, the priest was forced to witness the rape of his niece as well as the torture and dismemberment of his companions. Tiberio suffered a similar fate. Days later, his body was found castrated and without extremities in a bend of the Cauca River.

Among the dozens of murders and disappearances, submerged as underground memories given the regime of silence in Trujillo during the period of the massacre, and with the disappearance, torture and murder of Father Tiberio, a collective memory begins to emerge in which the figure of Tiberio becomes a consecrated reference – a witness and memorial of the violence suffered collectively, expressed in different aesthetic forms (painting, ossuaries, motifs in a chapel and its mausoleum), thereby propitiating political actions based on allegations at the national and international levels by the victims' families.

Following his death and the appearance of his dumped body, a process of gathering testimonies of other cases, which appeared unconnected at the time or had been silenced, began. The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission began documenting the tragedy, consolidating a corpus of testimonies that provided an account of what constituted systematic and generalized violations of human rights in Trujillo. The case was presented before the IACHR, which resulted in a long process leading to an amicable settlement in 2017 between the victims of the massacre and the Colombian state.

In 1995, the IACHR made recommendations to an Investigatory Commission on the Violent Events in Trujillo, including, as symbolic and moral reparations, the creation of a memorial for the victims.

In consultation with family members, a monument park was planned on land near the urban center of Trujillo. Its aims in terms of education, healing and rebuilding social bonds linked to demands for justice and peace led to the creation of an architectural and emotional plan based on the stages of grief that underlie this site of memory: accepting reality, experiencing the pain of loss, adapting to the environment in the absence of the dead, and finally, withdrawing and reinvesting emotional

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Figure 4: Ossuaries in Monument Park, Trujillo. Photograph taken by Freddy Guerrero[36]

energy in new social relations. In the park and as a spatial correlate, an area was created that describes the events: one for burial (the ossuaries), one for remembering, one for planting and a sculpture garden. These spaces are all interrelated.

The space arranges the bodies and the awareness of visitors through the spatial plan onto which the narrative of the *Asociación de Familiares de Víctimas de Trujillo* (AFAVIT) guides is superimposed: a geographical context, a political context and the context of AFAVIT's struggles are part of the framework that introduces the visitor. Subsequently, a tour notes the main massacres in the country. Further on, there are ossuaries that appear white and empty from a distance, but as each one is approached, the invisible begins to appear: each ossuary has a name, birth date and date of murder or disappearance, and from that white canvas in the distance, their images appear in relief, the faces and bodies molded and recreated by their relatives, and the absent appear there doing the activities or daily tasks for which they were known (Figure 4). This tour is undoubtedly a way to symbolically bring loved ones back to life; the soul here is not imprisoned, but freed from the forgetting and silence that the perpetrators sought to impose. The path thus leads through intolerable images, present along their journey, toward sites of commitment and a sense of a spectral injustice that coexists with an unfinished demand for justice, which is demanded through iconology and evidenced in AFAVIT's actions against the state.

In the iconography of the doors, ossuaries, murals and carved wood, and at the summit of Monument Park, in the priest's mausoleum, narratives intersect that lead to the meaning of Tiberio's shattered body, in which, paradoxically, the unity of dozens of previously individual cases comes together. Tiberio's body is the condensation

36 Photograph taken during visits to Monument Park in Trujillo in 2018 with students in the anthropology course.

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of the untimely specter, reflecting the injustice displayed in multiple human rights violations. It is, in turn, the sacrificial lamb, in part fulfilling the cultural mechanism of what René Girard calls the scapegoat,[37] reiterating its demand for justice for the lamb's innocence and the victimizer's unrecognized responsibility.

The case of Trujillo is emblematic because it represents a model of Colombia's paramilitary, state and drug trafficking patterns and has also become a model of the mobilization processes and reparation and memory policies in Colombia. Nonetheless, its memories are fragmented because they are located on the plane of counterhegemony and marginality, though the figure of Tiberio condenses the injustice of hundreds and facilitates the mobilization of individual accounts in a shared memory. Even so, it is at the center of disputes and even local silences, which challenge the existence of the memories and the figures represented.

Arenillo: The Virgin of Miracles

The community of Arenillo is located in the foothills of the Central Cordillera between the municipalities of Palmira and Pradera in the Valle del Cauca Department. Arenillo is strategically connected to the flat areas and hillsides of the center of the country and the Huila, Tolima and Cauca and Pacific regions. Being a rural settlement of no more than 5,000 inhabitants, its geographic location made it at some points a space for settlement, mobility and military planning by various illegal armed actors. The community was a victim of looting and prolonged confinement, as well as multiple human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, social stigmatization and other negative aspects amid the conflict.

Since 1919, Arenillo started receiving migrants from the Cauca region and Antioquia in search of access to fertile and productive land. A bimodal system was configured based on the process of human settlement in the territory, with primarily agricultural activities in the lowlands, such as growing blackberries, plantains and passionfruit, and forestry in the mountainous areas, involving the logging of *comino crespo* (laurel), *cedro* (cedar) and *arenillo* trees to construct homes in urban centers and neighboring areas or railway sleepers on the Pacific Railroad in the early 20th century.

The creation and persistence of paramilitary groups in Arenillo was possible due to their ties with some economic and political elites as well as drug traffickers in the region who financed their presence there, according to the CNMH.[38] This was a response to the different kidnappings recorded in the department by the ELN and the FARC. In the late 1990s, however, the counterinsurgency discourse turned the territory into an enclave of the drug processing and transportation circuit in the southeastern part of the country.

In a geostrategic context of military and economic connotations, the repertoires of violence of illegal actors and complacency of state agents configured systematic and generalized human rights violations in this rural area. Only in 2012 did the Colombian state recognize Arenillo as subject to collective reparations, accepting that during the armed conflict, damage resulting from violations of individual and

37 René Girard, *El Chivo Expiatorio* (Madrid: Ed. Anagrama, 2006).
38 CNMH, '*Patrones y Campesinos': Tierra, Poder y Violencia en el Valle del Cauca (1960–2012)* (2014).

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collective rights had grave impacts on the community fabric. Among the main victimizing acts, the state admits homicide, confinement, forced disappearances, threats, dispossession, rupture of the social fabric and violence, predominantly against women.[39]

The paramilitary commanders were lodged at a house known as 'the Chalet,' built in 1999. This site became known by inhabitants of the area as 'the Chalet of Death' because several civilians were sent there to be tortured and disappeared.[40] It is a site of memory because of its status as a witness and memorial; the institutional framework has identified it as a symbolic site for promoting the dynamics of resignification. Having been reconfigured as the Chalet of Death, it has been called the Chalet of Life or Hope during commemorative events, though it remains the same place, abandoned and in ruins as it was left by the paramilitaries. Here, the institutionality of TJ promotes symbolic exercises. However, these go against the practices and narratives that circulate in these spaces that resist resignification (there are reports of noises and ghosts inhabiting the site, unfolding that negative and ghostly reality noted by Georges Didi-Huberman or, alternatively, the intolerable images in Rancière).

This memory site is recalled by one of the villagers who witnessed many events at the Chalet. Speaking near his home, as he told us about ghosts, cries and other phenomena he deemed paranormal at the Chalet, he looked toward a small virgin placed at the side of the road and covered in an altar. The image led him to recall another story: the paramilitaries approached Don Camilo's[41] house to take some fighting cocks that he often brought to compete at a cockfighting ring near the village of Buitrera. They saw the black cock in a fight and decided to 'buy' it.

They arrived at Camilo's house and in an intimidating tone said they were members of the AUC and *mochacabezas* (beheaders). Camilo took the name literally. The paramilitaries were present for some months, and during a soccer game near the virgin, one of them kicked the ball and 'cut off the head' of the Virgin of Miracles (Figure 5). The materiality of the image thus reflects the imprint of the event, but the image will be marked by the series of barbaric and brutal occurrences at the site where it is located.

In response to the event, the commander approached to teach the troops a lesson by punishing the paramilitary that had damaged the religious figure. He asked Camilo what to do with the one who was responsible, hence putting the life of the young paramilitary in the hands of the villager. Camilo answered that it was no problem; he knew how to resolve it. He went into his house and returned with glue and paint to repair the virgin, thereby concluding the mortal controversy.

Therefore, the virgin is marginal, fragmentary and fragmented, as state institutions and the community have granted more symbolic value to the Chalet as a memory site. The virgin's memory is underground; one of Camilo's daughters said, 'If only

39 Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas, 'Arenillo,' 2019, https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/arenillo/255 (accessed 10 June 2019).

40 The prosecution has exhumed only around 17 bodies in the area. See, Paola Andrea Gómez Perafán, 'Crónica: El Arenillo en Palmira Sana Sus Heridas de la Guerra,' *El País*, 2013, https://www.elpais.com.co/valle/cronica-el-arenillo-en-palmira-sana-sus-heridas-de-la-guerra.html (accessed 1 November 2019).

41 The real name has been changed.

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Figure 5: The Virgin of Miracles. Photographs taken by Freddy Guerrero

that virgin would speak!' Then came stories of people who were still alive, yet held their own viscera in their hands, waiting before the virgin to be led to their final destination. When another inhabitant listened to the stories of the virgin, she noted that she knew nothing and was surprised. This reaction results, of course, from the intolerable aspect of these images, bringing back those ghosts that, for some individuals, make visible the guilt over an engagement in and habituation to violence in the years of paramilitary confinement.

However, the virgin also represents a more humane aspect of the stories regarding the events amid the war, for she facilitates access to nefarious stories as well as stories that recreate possibilities for humanity and forgiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The three cases of Tierralta, Trujillo and Arenillo display similarities and differences with respect to the process of building collective memory. They share religious imagery that can evoke both the events being denounced as well as their interpretation and sensitivities concerning the past, based on the allegories and metaphors expressed by the different motifs, which are also transformed into events derived from the context and sites where they are present, thus turning them into fragmentary memories. The differences between the cases are understood based on how they serve as referents of collective memory and its impact on the community, families or organizations: in Tierralta, the representation of the mural currently borders on forgetting; in Trujillo, the figure of Tiberio possesses an emblematic quality mediated by national and international religious and human rights organizations, as well as by the families of and organizations representing the victims, but is not adopted by the community in general; and in Arenillo, the virgin is more a private and underground memory that opposes other institutionally determined sites of memory.

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If an aspect of the fragmentary constitution of these images is meant to account for the past, namely, through the spectral evocation of open injustices and the unfulfilled demand for justice, then this condition is clearly located – in its allegorical and testimonial character – in the image itself. Whether each image stands as a memorial or witness depends on the intervention that directly or indirectly applies violence to its materiality: in the Tierralta mural, the disappearance of the figurative representations of torture and war by modifying or erasing the meaning of the reasons for the discord; in Arenillo, the breaking of the Virgin of Miracles and its restoration; and in Trujillo, the crippled Cristo Tiberio as a mirror of the evidence that reproduces his shattered body lying in the mausoleum in Monument Park.

In addition to the images' testimonial condition, their impact emerges through their positioning in public and visible spaces that are important to residents and visitors. In this sense, in contexts of conflict in which people are denied a voice, and silence is imposed, images, specifically intolerable images, in Rancière's terms, constitute one of the few possible forms of expression. The fragmentary condition remains when the images in those public sites are marginalized through erasure, indifference or rejection and silence in the face of self-incrimination.

Regarding the relational dimension, we observe a dispute over the representation and meaning of the past, which can be demonstrated socially from the intolerability of the images, dictated by the occupied site of the memories and the motives represented, as in the cases of Trujillo and Tierralta or the undisputed dispute of the Virgin of Miracles, which does not become significant in the presence of the Chalet, an object of institutional ritualization and intervention.

From a relational perspective, the fragmentary memory in Trujillo is also articulable with the material image of Cristo Tiberio, which condenses both a series of initially isolated events and forms of terror prevalent during the spectral massacre. The isolated events achieve unity in social processes of recording testimonies and in their circulation and through the allegations in international and national bodies. In a certain respect, this process coincides with the relationship between loose memories and the emblematic ones developed by Steve Stern: loose memories are evoked from silence and personal and family intimacy; they provide clues but do not generate a complete story or do not circulate freely as a version or interpretation of the barbaric past in public settings. However, *emblematic* memory possesses the following characteristics, according to Stern: historicity, authenticity, breadth, projection in public spaces, embodiment in a social referent that is convincing and spokespersons committed to sharing, organizing and projecting the memories.[42] The above adequately fits what Cristo Tiberio represents. It is a collective memory whose referent or indicator is Cristo Tiberio, accomplished through the spectrality of what he says and that he nonetheless fails to represent a totality that will always appear ghostly, hence his ambiguity: he is a disappeared person who appeared in pieces to testify about events that are always incomplete and open to the interpretation of mourning families and who is rejected by a neighboring population that considers his image intolerable.

42 Steve J. Stern, 'De La Memoria Suelta a La Memoria Emblemática: Hacia el Recordar y el Olvidar Como Proceso Historico (Chile 1973–1998),' in *Las Conmemoraciones: Las Disputas en las Fechas 'in-Felices,'* ed. Elizabeth Jelin (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002).

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In the Tierralta mural, the dispute over representation literally makes the image an underground memory, imposed by the silence of weapons, which today, following the events depicted by the image, repeat as violence that has become the norm rather than the exception. The image remains, above all for generations prior to this century – witnesses of violence for decades – as an example of a past that remains painful and silent, yet nonetheless does not stop questioning from the untimely silence of a wall painted white behind a church pulpit.

Regarding the Virgin of Miracles, she remains visible but not recognized as a referent of collective memory. Although she appears in the story of a family and neighbors surrounding the image, she begins fading in the Chalet, which the institutional framework has transformed into the official site of memory. The virgin thus contains a loose and underground memory that does not dispute the local representations of the past, yet challenges the silences that part of the community maintains concerning the forms of their victimization by or engagement with armed actors.

Notably, this image is a witness of not only violence but also the vindication of the human spirit and its ability to serve as a counterweight in the context of war. This image, then, despite its marginality, reflects the potential to transform narratives of terror into narratives of hope.

A fundamental issue in relation to images concerns how forms of mediation with the past make the past accessible beyond orality. This function implies an important contribution in contexts in which speaking explicitly about the time of victimization and abuse is difficult due to a regime of silence imposed externally or self-imposed, as Pollak lucidly describes with regard to underground memories. Images are powerful forms of interpellation. As Rancière notes:

> The image of art does not supply weapons for battle. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and consequently, a new landscape of the possible.[43]

The spiritual and aesthetic aspect are essential for understanding the cases described, for whereas a formal religiosity exists, there are also processes of popular religiosity that serve to assign meaning and foster sensitivity to personal and community experiences concerning the injustices. Therefore, the images in Tierralta, Trujillo and Arenillo demonstrate these religious survivals that are not exclusively framed within moral or orthodox interpretations or illustrations but, rather, in effect, develop a certain special communion that is sustained by Christian pain and passion but also local meanings, some of them marked by violence and as reflections of hope and resilience motivated by the sensations, emotions and narratives that the images promote and stimulate.

These images also mount a challenge to consider fragments, fragmentary memories, those material and symbolic aspects that appear to be marginal but whose content is awoken only when community settings are accessed with receptiveness and sensitivity. In the images, the marginal appears as meaningful and with the potential to mobilize reflections and actions constituting forms of symbolic reparation, the

43 Rancière, supra n 26 at 103.

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pursuit of truth and the production of memory that do not exclude the institutional but are complementary to it. Thus, the aim is to develop more horizontal conditions for the creation of memory, making it possible to give voice and overcome certain somatizing silences of victim populations and communities.

Finally, these forms of memory are important because they gather together traumatic, spectral experiences and examples, not only accounting for the processes of violence that they embody but also constituting sources of political mobilization, some of which have ended, as in Tierralta, and others that are active, as in Trujillo, or passive, as in Arenillo.

The cases are located in territories that have become objects of inquiry by the extrajudicial mechanisms of TJ in Colombia: Trujillo, as an emblematic case of the forms of drug trafficking violence and alliances between illegal sectors and state agents; Tierralta, the birthplace of liberal guerrillas in the 1950s and then of paramilitary groups in the 1980s, which covered much of the country until the first decade of this century; and Arenillo, relatively more modest in its emblematic character but explanatory nonetheless with regard to forms of territorial control through the confinement of populations and the dynamics of a prolonged presence in communities in this context.

These approaches do not reflect an interest in the contribution of aesthetics as a cultural production and a production of meaning, which may contribute to the identification of patterns of violence or forms of resistance and the reconstruction of the social fabric, important points within the mandate of the current Truth Commission in Colombia.

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